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JAMAICA AS A FIELD FOR INVESTMENT.

BY HIS EXCELLENCY SIR HENRY A. BLAKE, GOVERNOR
OF JAMAICA.

THE destruction of the fruit crop of Florida by the extreme cold of last winter was a cruel blow to those who had invested their time and money in the cultivation of oranges and other fruit in that state. In one short week the results of years of labor were swept away. The unripe fruit was frozen on the tree; the trees themselves were blasted and withered beyond recovery; and cultivators, who had already tasted the sweet savour of success, saw ruin staring them in the face.

Under the circumstances it is but natural that men who have suffered so much should turn their eyes to countries where the knowledge acquired at such a cost might be utilized free from the dread of the treacherous cold snap with which from time to time the Mississippi Valley smites the softer South, and hence it is that letters are now pouring in to the islands of the West Indies, asking for information on every point connected with the cultivation of fruit and vegetables, and inquiring if indeed these islands are like the dwelling place of the golden haired Rhadamanthus, where "the human kind enjoy the easiest life, no snow is there nor biting winter."

A prudent man whose money and whose time are to be adventured requires to be satisfied on certain cardinal points before he puts his hand to the plough. Those points are security of life and property, similarity of language, suitability of soil and climate, acquisition of land on reasonable terms, sufficiency of labor, facility of internal communication and ready access to the great markets of the world. The first two conditions practically confine his choice to the British West Indian Islands. The last is certain to attract him to Jamaica, which stands fully

equipped and ready to return a bounteous and certain harvest to the careful cultivator.

Jamaica lies ninety miles south of Cuba, one of its ports, Montego Bay, being 811 miles from Tampa. It is 144 miles long; varies in breadth from twenty-one to forty-nine miles, and its total area is 4,200 square miles.

Probably these figures will not convey much information to those who want to know. I will put it in another way. Take the map of Florida, and, following the railway from Tampa to Gainesville, draw a line from the latter to Cedar Keys. This will give approximately the area of Jamaica. Now run a range of mountains from Orient, in Hillsborough County, to Johnson's Pond, in Levy, varying in height from 7,500 feet at Orient to 1,800 feet at Johnson's Pond, with many secondary ranges and spurs, so that of the whole only 646 square miles, or 413,440 acres, are flat. Place in this parallelogram 4,000 miles of driving roads; 900 miles of bridle roads; 180 miles of railway connecting the capital, Kingston (which would occupy the position of Hudson in Pasco County), with a port, Montego Bay, on the northwest, and another, Port Antonio, on the northeast. Tilt the map so that Tampa and Gainesville lie east and west, and you will have a fair idea of Jamaica and her internal communications, to which ought to be added weekly steam communication between port and port round the island.

I will dismiss its natural beauties by saying that, if not the most beautiful island in the world, there is certainly no island of its size on earth more full of exquisite beauties. With such a contour it is evident that there must be great diversity of soil and climate. The flat alluvial plains of the south; the rolling uplands of the north; the rich mountain valleys, and the steep hillsides afford in one place or another a fitting habitat for every tropical and sub-tropical product. The island is singularly healthy, the average death rate being 22 per thousand. In the high hills a fireplace is necessary for the cold evenings, and in the plains the heat is assuaged by the sea breeze, which blows from 9 A. M. to 5 P. M., and the land breeze that sweeps down from the cool hill tops from 7 P. M. to 4 A. M. The rainfall varies from an average of 85 inches in the northeast to 54 inches in the southern district.

Of the island only about one-ninth part is cultivated, or

rather I should say that from that area crops are being raised ; for outside the sugar estates cultivation can hardly be said to have advanced beyond the system on which the Indians raised their crops before the visit of Columbus. Then the Indians burnt the forest, stirred the upper surface lightly and planted cocoa, ginger, and maize. To-day the black population may be said to raise their crops in identically the same manner. As soon as one patch is exhausted they move on to another, leaving behind them an exhausted surface that will no longer respond to the scraping of the hoe, and a virgin subsoil that would amply repay the deep cultivation of more advanced communities.

Nor can the black population fairly be blamed for this backwardness in methods of cultivation. They have not had the benefit of the example of cultivation by trained farmers with capital, and it must be acknowledged that in the hills, where most of the small farms are cultivated, the question of manuring the land has hitherto presented considerable difficulty. There are indications that education is increasing the intelligence of the people, and a general improvement in methods of agriculture may be expected.

But if the black population have not been progressive, neither have the white owners of property, and for them the same excuses cannot be made. In 1774 Long, in his *History of Jamaica*, points out how valuable an export oranges might become if propagated properly. Even then he remarked that while in 1747 North Carolina had exported 296,000 oranges, Jamaica had not yet begun to propagate the fruit properly. "Yet," he adds, "the finest China orange I ever ate in England was not comparable to the worst I have tasted in Jamaica."

Were Long to write to-day he might make the same remark as to the absence of a proper system of cultivation of oranges, lemons, limes, shaddocks and other kindred fruits. They have been planted, but not cultivated; packed in a way unusual in the American market ; and sent to compete with fruit, on the selection, cultivation, and preparation for market of which nothing that science could devise and careful attention accomplish has been left untried. Should the experienced orange growers, to whom nature has dealt so hard a measure in Florida, turn their attention to Jamaica as some are doing they will be richly rewarded by a perfect climate and a generous soil.

There is a prevalent idea that there is a rapid decrease in the number of the white population of the West Indies, and an equally prevalent assumption that this supposed decrease is due to the unhealthiness of those islands. That those assumptions are incorrect the following figures will show. In 1861 the white population of Jamaica numbered 13,816. In 1871 it numbered 13,101. In 1881 it was 14,432. In 1891 it was 14,692. Declining prosperity of the sugar industry will account for the slight decrease between 1861 and 1871, and it may be inferred that the recovery and subsequent increase is due to the development of the fruit trade within the last twenty years. There is every indication that the production of all kinds of fruit will increase, and that improved methods will be adopted. This improvement will probably begin with the Florida fruit growers, who propose to try Jamaica, and it will spread after a time among the black population.

There is an opening for the horticultural pioneer that promises even greater success than fruit-growing. Most excellent high-class vegetables can be grown so as to be ready for market between December and March. Jamaica is thus capable of being made the winter market garden of the United States, and vegetables planted in October could reach the American markets in January and February, during which months they would have a monopoly.

Two important factors in considering the pros and cons of a foreign investment must be the price of land and the taxes levied upon it. There is nothing more difficult than to say off-hand what is the average price of cultivable land. It varies from \$1 to \$100 per acre, depending upon situation, soil, competition, and the relative anxiety of the seller and buyer to deal. Probably for land in every way suitable \$7 would not be a bad estimate. It may be assumed that the land purchased would not be farther than ten miles from the railway or the sea, and everywhere there are good roads.

The taxes payable are six cents per acre on cultivated land, three cents per acre on common pasture and one-half cent per acre on "wood and ruinate."

Besides this the following taxes would be payable for a holding of 100 acres with a house assessed at the annual value of one hundred dollars. Poor rate, seven dollars twenty cents; educa-

tion tax, one dollar forty cents ; and holdings tax one dollar sixty cents. All these rates and taxes are devoted to the education of the people, repairs of roads, and care of the poor. As to labor, it is pretty much what the employer makes it. Employers or overseers may be roughly divided into three classes. A supervises his laborers carefully, pays them honestly, and if a man is unsatisfactory, discharges him. B lets them work their own way but on pay day stops an arbitrary amount for bad work. C gets what work he can, does not profess to stop wages, but cheats them in the payments. There is rarely any complaint heard from A of want of labor. B and C reap in due time the fruit of the distrust that they themselves have sown. The actual value of labor is pretty much the same in Jamaica as elsewhere, at the price. The ordinary laborer is slow, and as he does not properly feed himself he is not strong, but his wages are low, not averaging more than 36 cents per day. Probably it would be found that a given amount of earth would be moved at the same cost in Jamaica as in the United States, but the time taken for the work would be double in Jamaica. For light work in the fields there is no reason why European laborers might not be employed, even in the plains, while in the hills white men can labor without discomfort. There is constant communication with the United States, both by the regular lines and by fruit steamers. The postage rates are the same as those between the United States and England. It is only necessary to add that in the purchase of property, and the protection of their interests, aliens have the same rights as British subjects.

Jamaica has gone through a cycle of change. At one time the principal colony of Great Britain and the richest portion of her dominions, into whose capital, Port Royal, was poured the wealth of the Spanish main, the produce of legitimate and illegitimate warfare. Her riches gradually dwindled with the decreasing price of sugar, while her sanitary reputation was smirched by the perennial scourge of yellow fever that more than decimated the troops in the early part of this century, when everything in the clothing, feeding, and surroundings of the army courted the creation and propagation of the dreaded disease.

The manumission of the slaves set free new sources of activity and sugar ceased to be the single staple export of the island.

Some properties were sold, some abandoned, many were subdivided, but a considerable number have been carried on as sugar estates down to the present. Year by year lessening prices of sugar have reduced profits, but Jamaica rum commanded an average price that compensated for the loss on sugar. Now, the latter is beginning to feel the competition from Australia, and the owners of sugar estates take a gloomy view of the future. On many properties the sugar works are what they were a hundred years ago. On almost all, the cultivation of the canes is as primitive as when the Surinam settlers made their first plantations.

In the meantime the cultivation of bananas has been taken up systematically, and with the happiest results. Coffee and cacao are largely cultivated by the people, and it is probable that in a short time the excellent fruits that grow in such profusion in Jamaica will find their way to the American and European markets. It only requires the lead of intelligent cultivators to give an impetus to systematic production, the result of which will be increased facilities of transit and lowered rates. That we are about to enter upon this phase is evident, and those who lead the way will reap the richest harvest.

HENRY A. BLAKE.